

Homeworkers in Turkey:

Home Bounded - Global Outreach

SANIYE DEDEOGLU, MUGLA UNIVERSITY

OZGE BERBER AGTAS, ILO OFFICE FOR TURKEY

ADAPT INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON «LABOUR IS NOT A
COMMODITY», 28-30 NOVEMBER 2019, BERGAMO, ITALY

The Study Focus

- The current state of homework in Turkey
- Two categories of homeworkers
 1. Industrial home-based pieceworkers
 2. Freelance remote workers
- Turkey Country Report for ILO Global Homeworkers Report



Data Collection

- The empirical information collected between June and September 2019.
- Three focus group discussions with industrial pieceworkers were held in Istanbul, including 23 women in total.
- Three interviews with female intermediaries who distribute work to pieceworkers, one with an outsourcer (fasoncu) and one with a garment atelier owner.
- For freelancers, 10 individual interviews were conducted mostly online via skype or other digital connectors.
- Two interviews with a freelance organisation representatives



Defining Homework

- The ILO Convention 177 defines homework as a work carried out by a person:
 - (i) in his or her home or in other premises of his or her choice, other than the workplace of the employer;
 - (ii) for remuneration;
 - (iii) which results in a product or service as specified by the employer, irrespective of who provides the equipment, materials or other inputs used.
- Homeworkers differ from entrepreneurs, or self-employed, or family business, in that they are hired by companies for specific activities or services to be done from their homes. Homeworkers do not own or operate the business they work for.
- The ILO estimates that around 260 million workers (7.9% of all workers) including 143 million women are working from home in 2018.



Legal Structure: Protection of Homeworkers (Labour Law and Turkish Code of Obligations)

Labour Law, 2016, the Article 14, amended to include remote employment

- Remote employment is a labour relation based on the principle of performing the action of working at home or by means of technological communication tools, within the scope of the work organization formed by the employer and established in writing.
- In the remote employment, workers shall not be subjected to any procedure different than a comparable worker, due to the nature of his/her labour contract, unless a reason justifying discrimination exists.
- The employer shall be liable to inform the employee of the occupational health and security measures, in consideration of the nature of the work performed by the employee through a remote employment relation, provide necessary training, ensure health monitoring and take necessary measures of occupational security relating to the equipment provided.

Articles 461-469 of the Code of Obligations include;

- Homework service contract is defined as a work done by the employee with or without his/her family member for a fee.
- The employer informs the worker of the working conditions and wages in written contract.
- Responsibilities of a worker (Doing the job and using materials and work tools carefully)
- Responsibilities of employer (product acceptance, wage payment and obligation to pay fees in case of the prevention of work)
- During the probation period, the contract is deemed to have been established.
- If there is no provision, the general provisions of the service contract implementation, regulations are included

Homeworkers in Turkey

- In 2016, 2.6 percent (610.771) of all private-sector employees worked at home, of which women accounted for 89 percent of those working at home .
- The female- dominated nature of homework in Turkey also manifests itself in the fact that 87 percent of all workers is unregistered and operating in the informal economy.
- Only 13 percent is working in the formal employment with social security coverage
- The role of home-based piece workers in generating the export success of the garment industry
- Reaching out to women's work and labour is a way of industry's flexibility and global competition.



Home-Based Pieceworkers

- Why women's homework is hidden and invisible
- Deliberate obscuring and concealing their work and contribution
- Prioritizing the roles as mothers and wives over their income-generating activities
- Gender norms and ideologies
- Home-based work an expression of their identity as “good” and hard-working Muslim women.
- Uneasy definitions of work and ‘work’.
- Home-based workers fall mainly in the age range of 30-45,
- Lower levels of schooling (on average they have completed five years of compulsory schooling)
- Married with children.
- Piecework is the main work opportunity for the poor middle-aged women with few qualifications and heavy childcare and domestic responsibilities.

Employment status and recruitment

Reproduction of patriarchal character of social relations through recruitment:

1. Unpaid family worker:

- Family members working for their own atelier
- Having a diverse role: directly contributing to production, cooking for (garment) workers, cleaning the workplace, trimming and cleaning garments at home
- Mobilize their neighbors and relatives to engage in piecework

2. Recruitment through intermediary:

- Subcontracting through garment ateliers:
 - Larger-scale factories use garment ateliers as mediators to reach out home-based workers to distribute garment pieces
- Subcontracting through middle-men:
 - Some companies specialized in designer and high fashion production directly contacts with home-based workers

Working Conditions

- Long working hours depending on the volume of the work
- Working under tight deadlines
- Invisible work
- Informality is the rule
- No social protection (both health and retirement)
- No OSH protection
- No contract, no guaranteed monthly wage
- No job security
- No protection of core labour rights
- Engagement of their child as helper



Earnings-Piece rates

- Two side of the coin:
 - Intermediary women: Women act as intermediary to contribute to their household. The average earning is around 1,500 – 2,000 TRY (equivalent to 200-300 EUR)
 - Home-based women: Home-based workers earn approx. 800-1000 TRY (equivalent to 125-200 EUR) per month.
- No national data is available on the level of earning.
- Intermediators charge commissions from pieceworkers almost 50% of their wages which is a manifestation of women's absolute dependency on intermediators to get work and income generation
- Minimum wage in Turkey is around 350 EUR.
- The main aim is to contribute to the household income and and to support their children's education.
- Despite the marginality of their income, home-based workers aware of their crucial role in surviving the family
- However, this does not translate into women's perception of themselves as workers and breadwinner for their household!

Freelance Homeworkers: Remote, Online and Homebased Workforce

Who are they?

- Invisible workforce of the gig or on-demand economy
- Well-educated young professionals with higher degree in MBA, MA...
- Working in various sectors including ICT, translation, design, media...
- Working online and without any office space: home, cafes, libraries, public places
- Prefer to have flexible working hours and spaces (?):

“I had voluntarily terminated my 3-year full-time corporate work before I started freelance work. I was so bored of corporate work and its rules because I had to put up with endless meetings where no one can continuously decide anything and with pretentious colleagues in the workplace. Working in such an environment kills anyone’s creativity that’s why I didn’t want to continue...”



Employment status

- Constant change in the employment status:
 - the dependent contractor for agencies or companies
 - Self-employed/own-account
 - An intermediary

“I've been focusing on online marketing in recent years, working on online advertising. I do website and I do the landing pages of websites. I usually work with local companies in the city where I live. Online advertising is aimed at increase the turnover of these companies. This is my business in which I am contracted to work. Apart from this, I also have my own business. I have my own websites. I arbitrage over them. I buy traffic in a cheap way through Google or Facebook and show ads to these people. In this way, I give one and get back three.”



Working conditions

- Working for various clients/contractors:
 - Companies, agencies subcontracted by companies, individuals
 - International/national
 - Digital platforms as intermediary
 - Limited face-to-face personal communication
- Working without a written contract
- Delays in payments or no payment at all
- Working output-based tasks with tight deadlines
- Unstable and long working hours: flexibility in working time does not mean less work!
- No social protection (social security, retirement and health coverage)
- No job security
- No protection of core labour rights
- Unhealthy and isolated working conditions



Earnings-Piece rates

- Two factors affecting the earning:
 - Desire to work longer hours and get more work
 - Their reputation in the market / networking
- Unstable income rising or falling with the individual performance
- No standard rate for hourly or out-put based work: high fluctuation in rates
- High competition lowering rates
- Non-payment



Work-life balance

- Perception of homework is considered to be a problem as freelancers are often seen to be unemployed by their families
- Homework is not considered as a proper job
- Its negative implications on the division of labour at home:

“When I was living with my girlfriend, I was working from home and she was working full time. So she was going out in the morning and coming back in the evening. When she came back home in the evening, she was always asking me why you didn't cook and why you didn't tidy the house since I stayed at home all day”.

“Let's say that there is parents' meeting at school for children. He [her husband] considers that I can go to that meeting since I am not working in an office. Actually, my husband knows his domestic responsibilities and used to follow them when I was working in a bank. But my status change has affected me negatively in domestic sphere...”



Collective action: The Case of Offissizler (The Officeless)

- *Ofissizler* (The Officeless) is a member-funded network of solidarity among freelance workers founded in Istanbul in 2018.
- Their main motto is explained by ‘**full-time solidarity, not freelance**’
- *Ofissizler* aims:
 - to bring visibility to freelancing as a non-standard form of employment,
 - to investigate the working conditions of freelancers and
 - to build solidarity networks among them with the aim of overcoming the isolating conditions of freelancers.
 - To demanding and promoting legal rights for freelancers (i.e. setting minimum rates, preventing non-payment, demanding contract and social security benefits etc.)
 - supporting alternative forms of production that freelancers could establish (cooperatives, work-sharing, skill-pooling etc.)



Collective action: The Case of Offissizler (The Officeless)

- They don't only aim to demand and advocate for legal rights, but they also investigate the possibilities of establishing solidarity economies among freelancers through establishment of a cooperative.
- Issues such as job insecurity, unregistered work, non-payment of wages, long working hours, social isolation and occupational health and safety are main problems that the organisation is trying to offer solutions for.
- *Ofissizler* is organising to find alternative working spaces for homeworkers, arguing against working in coffee shops and promoting collective shared office spaces
- They also organize informative meetings and workshops on topics such as freelance contractual procedures, legislative rights, and documentary screenings.



Conclusion

- The piecework and online-based freelance work are distinctly different employment practice performed by different workers groups.
- Their underlying common character is their place of work where they perform their work.

Motivation

For homeworkers, home-based work is seen to have the ability to control one's own time, and the flexibility of combining family care responsibilities with earning an income.

While having control over their time and flexibility is more relevant for freelancer but being able to attend family responsibilities while working is much more important for home-based pieceworkers.



Conclusion

Commonalities:

- Considering their informal working conditions and vulnerabilities they face in their work, the both groups have so much similar in common.
- Their jobs are prone to certain risks that increase vulnerability and precariousness of being a home-based worker
- The role of intermediators
- Having limited coverage of social security and health insurance benefits including retirement and unemployment
- Their dependency on their families enforcing patriarchal gender roles and relations in families.
- Work-life balance arrangements

Challenges:

- The invisibility of homeworkers
- Perception of their work as not being a proper way of work
- Blurring line of employment status between unemployed, housewives and self-employed and lack of public record of their jobs
- Informal nature of their work
- The contractual agreement with their employer, principal, agency or subcontractor are most often verbal.
- There is a high risk of non-payments of wages and vulnerability in an environment where the course of legal action is never practiced.
- Weak organisational structure and collective action

Differences:

- For freelancers, the pay is much more satisfactory because it is more than double of minimum wage and these workers have the potential to increase their earning whenever they want to.
- They also have had establish a form of informal networks to keep the market price rate at a certain threshold and not let it go down too low.
- For industrial homeworkers, this question of keeping wages at a certain level is not relevant. Earning something is always better than nothing.
- Homework in Turkey is the most exploitative forms of labour and homeworkers account for the most vulnerable segment of the working class with a slim opportunity to defend their rights and to improve working conditions through collective action and organization.
- Even there are social, cultural and economic distinctions between these two groups, their insecurities, non-decent working conditions and low bargaining power have resulted their intensified vulnerabilities in the Turkish labour markets.